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THE PRESENT
HAPPINESS OF GREAT BRITAIN.
A
SERMON

PREACHED AT
ST. ANDREWS, Oct. 7th, 1792.

AND IN
THE HIGH CHURCH OF EDINBURGH,
Nov. 18th, 1792.

BY

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THE HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN

PERFORMED AT

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

AND IN

THE HALL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF

EDINBURGH



CHURCH OF ST. ANDREW

EDINBURGH

AND ONE OF THE CHURCHES OF THE CITY

EDINBURGH

PRINTED FOR JAMES BALGONIE

IN THE CITY

OF EDINBURGH

S E R M O N.

DEUT. xxxiii. 29.

Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!

THIS chapter contains the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death.—Having led them forty years through the wilderness, till they came to the banks of Jordan, he here expresses, by the spirit of prophecy, in words apposite to the character and situation of the several tribes, the portion which God had destined for them in

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the land into which they were about to enter : He mingles with his predictions his own affectionate wishes for the prosperity of every particular tribe ; and he concludes the review of the several parts with this fervent acknowledgment of that favour of heaven which distinguished the whole people. *Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord ?*

WITH these sentiments of gratitude and satisfaction which their history naturally inspired, Moses takes leave of those whom he had long guided. It was ordained of heaven, that this people saved by the Lord should, under the conduct of other leaders, go in to possess the promised land, and that, by the events which befel them in that land, they should exhibit to the nations of the earth, an awful specimen of the judgments by which the Almighty punishes ingratitude. But whatever calamities they afterwards experienced, the words of Moses, at the time when he spoke them, were literally true ; and had the children of Israel profited by the example

example here set before them, they would not have forfeited the unequalled happiness to which they were exalted by the favour of Him who was the *Shield of their help, and the Sword of their excellency.*

THE words which Moses spake concerning the children of Israel may, without any violence, be applied to the inhabitants of Great Britain : And if you perceive the application to be just, who will not feel that there is a propriety in making it ? For wheresoever there is happiness, it is right, it is according to the order of nature, that there should be an acknowledgment of it. I trust then; that I shall not appear to depart from the duties of this place, but that I shall speak both what it is agreeable to you to hear, and what it becomes a good citizen, and a faithful minister of this established church to say, when I adopt the words of Moses, and, taking them as my guide, bring to your remembrance that, as a nation, we are a *people saved by the Lord*,—that we are a *happy people*,—and that *there is none like us.*

In the FIRST place, as a nation, we are a people saved by the Lord.

REASON and Scripture teach us to consider that Almighty Being, who created all things by the word of his power, as the Governour among the nations, who, sitting upon the throne of his holiness, orders all the events which affect the largest societies of men, with the same sovereignty and the same ease, as those which respect any individual. *He encreaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth, and he straiteneth them again.* When he speaks concerning a kingdom, to plant and to raise it, it is fostered by his hand during its infant state: it emerges from rudeness, or weakness, or tyranny, and is conducted to that degree of strength and opulence, and prosperity, which he has destined.

WHAT an illustrious example of such superintendence does our island afford!—
From the barbarity of our ancestors, from the oppression of Roman governors, from
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the perpetual wars of petty principalities, from the frequent devastations, and the national antipathies of two bordering kingdoms, it hath risen to be one powerful state, united under the same government, and availing itself, by this union, of all the advantages of its situation for internal security, for commerce, and for conquest. No human wisdom could have reached through that succession of ages, during which our government was receiving its form; and no power of man could have directed those various occurrences which contributed to its perfection. It was he who sees the end from the beginning, that employed the wisdom of some of our rulers, and the folly of others, the extravagance of oppression, and the madness of anarchy to cement the different parts of that building, which he designed as the glory of our land; that crowned with success the valour of many patriots, who reared this building with one hand, while they held their swords in the other; and that has often interposed to discover and to defeat the schemes of those who endeavoured to sap or to pull it down.

When, at the end of the last century, a black cloud hung over these kingdoms, when Popery and arbitrary power were advancing with rapid strides, and the nation appeared to be tamely sinking into the most abject slavery,—He who ruleth in the hearts of men, and who from his throne in heaven watched over the sacred rights which were then invaded, raised up William of Orange, a prince formed by talents and situation to be our Deliverer. Signal interpositions of Providence facilitated his landing : An unexpected union of men, whose political sentiments had been most discordant, prepared his way ; and, through the special favour of heaven, without the tumult and massacres, which, in other countries, have generally attended a change of government, there was calmly accomplished, in both parts of this island, that great event, which every Briton, who loves his country, and who understands its true interest, styles, with a mixed emotion of gratitude and national pride, the Glorious Revolution. *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou*

thou didst in their days, in the times of old ; for they got not the land in possession by their own swords, neither did their own arm save them : but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance. God is known in our palaces for a refuge. The Lord of hosts hath been with us.

It is not merely from a foreign enemy, or from the dire effects of intestine commotions, that we have been saved by the Lord : But my text suggests the compleatness of the salvation which he hath wrought for us, and leads me to say, in the SECOND place, that as a nation, we are a happy people. *Happy art thou, O people saved by the Lord !*

If men, by living independently, could enjoy the full measure of their natural advantages, without fear of molestation, there would be no reason why one man should be authorized to exercise any kind of controul over the actions of another. But if man, by the very condition of his being, is born in society, and in subjection, if the assistance

sistance of our fellow-creatures, is necessary to the gathering what nature affords, and still more to the improvements of science, and the refinements of art, there must be some orderly method of combining the exertions of the different members of society, for the production of these common ends, in which all are interested, and of distributing the several employments, which contribute to the good of the whole. If the generality of mankind, are more attentive to their own interest, than to the rights of their neighbour, or the welfare of the Community, and if the passions of many are so headstrong as to lead them to the commission of open crimes, men cannot feel security or happiness in associating, unless there be a supreme controuling power, which protects the mean from the oppression of the mighty; which defends the few against the combination of the many; and which leaves every man at liberty, to mind his own concerns, to reap the fruits of his own labours, and to enjoy his good fortune, provided he does no harm to his neighbour. This is the end of Government :

Government : The measure in which this end is attained, forms the standard by which the excellence of every Government ought to be tried ; and we are happy as a nation, because this end is compleately attained under that constitution, to which the power of Heaven hath conducted us. The security of our rights does not depend upon the caprice of any of the sons of men. Our persons and our good name are protected by laws which have been enacted with wisdom, and which are interpreted and executed with impartiality. Our property is secured against the violence of our neighbour ; and it is not extorted for the public service by any arbitrary mandate, but is collected in the manner fixed by those who are the representatives of the people, who are bound by every tie to consult the interests of the people, and who bear their own share of every burden.

The same laws which guard our civil rights, have established that religion, which we believe to be divine. We possess, under
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the protection of Government, the *faith which was once delivered to the saints* : Our consciences are not subject to the commandment of men : we have one master, even Christ Jesus ; and every man may, without fear of incurring any punishment, adopt that mode of worship, and attach himself to that sect of Christians, which in his opinion, is most agreeable to the word of God.

THERE is amongst us, as there must be in all large bodies of men, the distinction of rich and poor, and a subordination of ranks. This distinction and subordination are founded in nature, in the different talents of men, in the different opportunities of employing their talents which Providence affords them in the wants and occasions of society. The varieties of the human character, and the circumstances of the human race, have produced inequalities amongst men ever since the world began, and have quickly destroyed the various levelling schemes which have arisen at different times to unhinge the order of Society. It is no reproach

proach to our Government, then, that it involves a distinction of ranks. It is one of its excellencies that the distinctions which prevail in this country, are of a kind which ministers to the general welfare. They form a check, which every wise and experienced observer knows to be of essential use in our popular Government ; a bond which cements the several parts of the complicated fabric ; a security to all the orders of the state, against the return either of despotism, or of tumult. They open the most generous incitements to the exertions of genius, and industry, and patriotism ; and they provide that variety of employments which is included in the prosperity of a great nation. While the body of the people, are left to follow their own course ; while every labourer, every mechanic, every merchant, every manufacturer, who is skilful and industrious, by providing a comfortable subsistence for himself and his family, adds to the wealth of his country, although he never extends his views farther than his own interest ; there are also persons called by their station in Society,

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to be actuated by sentiments of public spirit, to attend to the good of the state, and to care for the whole : There are men of Science, whose discoveries extend and facilitate the improvement of arts : There are men of research and comprehensive views, whose writings are the light of their country : There are judges to interpret, and apply the laws ; there are Magistrates to preserve the public peace ; there are instructors of youth ; there are Ministers of religion. None of those classes of citizens directly increase the quantity of corn, or cloth, or hard-ware, or of any of the other articles which are accounted the wealth of the country ; yet all of them are useful servants to the public ; and by that measure of security, of information, and of virtue, which is the fruit of their united labours, they amply repay the provision which is made for them.

As the distinctions which prevail in our Government are useful, so they are not attended with any humiliating circumstance. If the lowest offices in society must be performed

formed, those who have the charge of performing them, are not in this country, overlooked or insulted. The arm of the law, is extended to protect the meanest in the exercise of his rights: Every dutiful subject finds when he is oppressed, that the law was made for him: The peasant is not the slave of his lord; but sits secure in his cottage, and shares in peace with those whom he loves, the bread which he has earned.

Nor is any man necessarily detained in the station, in which he happens to be born. Eminent talents and favourable circumstances have often carried forward the son of the humblest parents. From whatever point a man sets out, there is in this country no insuperable bar, to his overtaking those who are before him. He is at liberty to avail himself of the occurrences of life; he is encouraged in his progress; every acquisition is his own; and by a well directed and successful industry, he may attain to wealth
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and he may transmit his name with honour to his posterity.

THE same blessings which the individual derives from our excellent Government, extend to his friends. He sees them pursuing the occupations, and following the paths to preferment, which open to them: And, however far they are removed from him, he knows that, while they continue the subjects of Great Britain, the same protection under which he prospers, ensures to them the quiet enjoyment of the fruit of their labours. Every father of a family, who has sons to send forth, every friend who wishes well to the companions of his youth, every benevolent man who desires the good of his country, must rejoice in this diffusion of happiness. All the affections, which interest us, in the fortunes of others, thus endear to us the Government under which we live; and for the sake of those whom we bear in our hearts, induce us to take the warmest concern in its stability, and to give it our affectionate support.

My text leads me to say, in the THIRD place, that, as a nation, there is none like us. *Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!*

THERE is no satisfaction in contemplating the unhappiness of others. A man, whose heart is sound, and whose understanding is enlightened, will not think himself bound by his partiality to his own country, to wish that other nations may be detained in a state of inferiority; but he will shew that he is worthy of the blessings which he and his countrymen enjoy, by the fervour with which he desires that they may be spread over the face of the earth. It is a fact, however, that the measure of happiness, which, through the favour of heaven, we, as a nation, enjoy, is at this day unexampled. While in the great empires of Asia and Africa, there is unlimited despotism, the entire subjection of the lives and properties of millions to the uncontrouled dominion of one man—while upon the coasts of North America, there is an infant government which has many steps
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to pass through, before it be so far accommodated to an immense extent of territory, and to the interests and the wants of its several states, as to attain maturity and stability, while in some states of Europe there is a narrowness of territory, which does not afford sufficient resources for defence against foreign enemies, or there are internal defects, which produce tardiness and feebleness in the public counsels—while in others, the oppressive and imperfect system of former times remains with little mitigation.—And while our neighbours, who in their zeal to correct what was wrong, began with dissolving the bands of civil society, and with exploding all that had been held sacred for ages, are now engaged in a hazardous experiment, fraught with much present evil, and most uncertain in the issue ;—this favoured island lifts its head in the midst of the ocean, the wonder and envy of the world, enjoying profound peace amidst the convulsions of other countries, improving its commerce, extending its manufactures, and reaping the fruits of the struggles of former days, in a constitution which after
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having been tried for more than a century, is found to unite, in a degree that is unparalleled, the blessings of liberty and order; which, by the nice counterpoise of its parts, administers a check at once to the abuse of power in the great, and to the licentiousness of the multitude; and which, having attained the happy medium sought for in vain by all other nations, exhibits an instance of freedom better regulated, and happiness more immediately derived from the form of government, than is to be found in ancient or in modern times.

THUS literally may the words which Moses spake concerning the children of Israel be applied to the inhabitants of Great Britain. We are a people *saved by the Lord*: as a nation we *are happy: and there is none like us*.

THE IMPROVEMENT of this subject, may be summed up in the two following inferences.

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I. IF

1. If the view which has been given of our situation be just, let us devoutly acknowledge the God of our fathers. The bounties of providence which mark our lot as individuals, fill our hearts with gratitude; and shall the national mercies of which we, and all that are dear to us partake, pass unnoticed? The returns of gratitude from a worthy mind always bear some proportion to the blessings received; and shall not a people, distinguished by the favour of heaven above all that surround them, avouch the Lord by whom they have been saved to be their God, and serve him with all their hearts? *He hath not dealt so with any nation. Praise ye the Lord.*

It is not only fit and right that happiness, such as we enjoy, should be devoutly acknowledged: But this most serious and awful consideration is to be added, that unless a sense of religion be preserved in the minds of the people, we cannot expect that this happiness will continue. Religion is the cement of civil society: It overawes many
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head-strong passions which know no other controul: It conciliates respect for every rich man who appears to feel its influence; It procures shelter for the poor; and uniting, by their subjection to a common sovereign, those whose circumstances are most dissimilar, it keeps the king and the peasant in their places, and yet makes them brethren in the Lord.

If thou seek the Lord, said David to his son Solomon, he will be found of thee: but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever. As we would wish, my friends, to prolong, during our own days, the happiness of the present times, and to transmit to our children the precious inheritance which we received from our fathers, let us learn to *fear the Lord for our good always*, and let us *make known his wonderful works to the generation to come*, that they also may set their hope in God. Let your acknowledgment of national happiness appear by a respect for the public establishments of religion. In your closets, and your families,

you offer thanksgiving for private blessings ; It is when you go up with the multitude to the house of the Lord, that you express your sense of those mercies which are common to all the inhabitants of this Island, in which the rich and the poor, the rulers and the subjects, have a joint interest. Let the example set by the Father of his people descend through his princes and his nobles to every rank, that from all the parts of this happy Island, there may ascend continually that spiritual sacrifice acceptable by Jesus Christ, which is more grateful to the Almighty than all the incense that ever was burnt,—even the tribute of thanksgiving paid with one heart by a people imprest with this sentiment that the happiness in which *none are like them* is the gift of heaven.

2. If the view that has been given of our situation be just, let us acquiesce in the happiness which we enjoy ; in other words, let our thankfulness to heaven, be accompanied with contentment and satisfaction.

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THOSE who feel their condition uncomfortable, naturally wish to amend it : And there are some political situations, so wretched that men are warranted, in defence of their natural rights, to interrupt the public peace, and by a violent effort to break their fetters. But why should those who are happy wish for a change ? And how can patriotism, that pure exalted principle, which holds no counsel with private passions, and sordid views, how can patriotism justify those who actually enjoy, in an unexampled degree, the great blessings of society, for again exposing their country to these hazards which she encountered in attaining them ? In a Government so complicated as ours, the probability is that any violent change, although intended to super-induce some new perfection, may create some new defect : And there is a very great danger that by that appeal to the multitude, which must be the instrument of accomplishing every violent change, a spirit will be excited which may go far beyond the views of those who made that appeal, which may pull
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down what they wished to support, which may recoil with irresistible force, upon their own heads, and produce a measure and an extent of distress, that did not enter into their calculations. Speculative men may form an idea of a government more perfect than ours : But speculative men ought not to forget, that whatever notions of excellence may be conceived, yet in practice and in real life, every human system must be imperfect, because every system in which men are actors, necessarily partakes of their weakness and corruption. Accordingly a Government more perfect than ours never has in fact existed : We enjoy at present the best that is known : And one, which, while it secures our rights, is continually receiving improvements ; improvements which arise insensibly, without danger, and with much real benefit, from the changes of manners, from the progress of society, from the diffusion of enlightened and liberal views, and from incidental occurrences. Every wise and good citizen, marks these gradual improvements with delight : He receives them with thankfulness,

fulness, as continued expressions of the favour of Him whose providence superintends all events, and combines them for the accomplishment of his purposes. But while he blesses the Governor among the nations for the large measure of happiness which is enjoyed, by the people of this country, he is warned by reading and experience to guard, most anxiously, against the danger of losing what is real and substantial in pursuit of goods ideal and unnecessary : And he sees the council which was given of old, by Solomon, written at this moment in the largest characters, and held up to the attention of every inhabitant of Great Britain : *My son, fear thou the Lord, and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change.*

THE END.

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